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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PGOV KWBG IS GAZA DISENGAGEMENT GOI INTERNAL SETTLEMENTS

SUBJECT: KNESSET MEMBERS VISIT GAZA SETTLEMENTS, SOME  
POSITIVE, SOME PAINED AS THEY LEAVE

Classified By: Political Counselor Norman Olsen for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Knesset members who support disengagement as well as those who oppose it have been visiting the Gaza settlements since the disengagement process began August 15. Some have gone to show support for the settlers, while others have gone to show sensitivity to the settlers, but also to support the IDF and police. Pro-disengagement Shinui MK Ilan Lebovitch spoke with Poloff August 17 just as he was driving out of Gush Katif after having met with residents and IDF soldiers. Lebovitch said that the process has been very difficult for the IDF and the settlers, but that it appears to him that the evacuation nonetheless has been moving forward and working well. He highlighted the "wonderful job" the IDF and police are doing. Lebovitch said that most of the residents he saw in Gush Katif were remaining in their homes. (Note: Israeli security personnel asked residents to remain in their homes so that officials could deal with Israeli demonstrators who had infiltrated the area.) He said that the IDF and police were mainly dealing with youth who had infiltrated into the settlements. Lebovitch assessed that at the time the IDF moves to forcibly evacuate the Gush Katif settlements, some residents will leave voluntarily and others will be removed by the IDF, but most will not act violently. Lebovitch said that some residents clearly did not want him there, as he is a member of a party that has supported disengagement. He said that, nevertheless, it was important for him to go to support the IDF and police.

2. (C) Likud MKs and disengagement foes Gilad Erdan and Gideon Sa'ar visited Gush Katif on August 14 and met with settlement leaders with the aim of discouraging confrontations with the IDF. Erdan told Poloff on August 17 that the evacuation process seems like it will be completed quickly. He assessed that the IDF may encounter problems in the two isolated and deeply ideological central-Gaza settlements of Netzarim and Kfar Darom, where they could encounter more extremists. Erdan stressed that he is very unhappy about disengagement in general and that it is a bad time for him.

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